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Gov. Deval Patrick lifts 23-year-old moratorium on incinerators in Mass.



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Gov. Deval Patrick has earned the adoration of environmentalists by championing the proliferation of solar panels and wind turbines in Massachusetts.

Now, the governor is sparking anger among some of those same activists for championing another type of energy plant: incinerators.

Patrick's Department of Environmental Protection has lifted its 23-year-old moratorium on allowing new incinerators to be built in Massachusetts as part of the agency's latest "[solid waste master plan](#)," despite a flood of criticism from opponents during the DEP's public comment period on the new rules. The DEP's goal is to reduce the amount of waste shipped out of state by 2020. To that end, the DEP has decided to allow the gasification or pyrolysis of up to 350,000 tons of trash per year – or about half of the shortfall that the DEP predicts the state will have in 2020, even if all of the master plan's goals are not met. Without the allowance of some incinerators, or "municipal waste combustion," the DEP says 700,000 tons of garbage eventually would be shipped out of state each year. The moratorium will remain in place for construction of incinerators that use "traditional combustion of municipal solid waste," the agency says.

The DEP says lifting the moratorium will encourage the development of alternative incinerator technologies that could minimize any harmful off-site pollutants, while converting the trash to energy or fuel. The DEP says its new rules would need to meet stringent recycling, emissions and energy efficiency standards.

But environmental activists aren't convinced. A coalition of activist groups known as [Don't Waste Massachusetts](#) called the reversal of the incinerator moratorium a "betrayal of the public's expressed wishes." The coalition says gasification - or staged incineration - has a record of failure in this country, and that incinerators create toxic byproducts that, in turn,

have to be packed into a landfill. Activists also argue that the state should do a better job of ensuring that materials that can be recycled don't end up in the state's landfills.

The DEP most recently considered lifting the moratorium in 2009, but backed down amid strident opposition at the time.

There's at least one company already lining up to take advantage of the DEP's new rule change. Pennsylvania-based Interstate Waste Technologies wants to build a gasification plant to replace a municipal landfill in Taunton. The Taunton Daily Gazette reported that IWT has [proposed a facility that would cost at least \\$500 million](#) for a site next to the Myles Standish Industrial Park, to produce synthetic gas from solid waste and then convert that synthetic gas to methanol for the production of gasoline.